

THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER

By RUPERT HUGHES

It was such a luxury to Deborah to be sought after even with the hippopotamus stench that she rather prolonged the suspense and teased Crawford to an offer, and to an increase in that, before she told him that she would have to "think it over."

He lingered on the porch steps to offer Deborah "anything within reason," but she told him she would think it over. When she thought it over she felt it would be base ingratitude to desert Asaph Shillaber, who had saved her from starvation by taking her into his beautiful shop. No bride should decoy her thence so long as he wanted her.

A few evenings later there was another ring at the Larrabee bell. This time Mrs. Larrabee showed no alarm except that she might be late to the door. It was Asaph! He was as sheepish as a boy. He said that it was kind of lonesome over at his house and seeing their light he thought he'd drop round and be a little neighborly. Everybody was growing neighborly nowadays.

Once more Mrs. Larrabee vanished. As she sat in the dining room pretending to knit she thought how good it was to have a man in the house. The rumble of a big voice was so comfortable that she fell asleep long before Asaph could bring himself to go home.

He had previously sought diversion in the society of some of the very young and very pretty salesgirls in his store, but he found that, for all their graces, their prattle bored him. They talked about themselves or their friends. But Debby talked to Asaph about Asaph.

That long-silent doorbell became a thing to listen for of evenings. Jim Crawford dropped round now and then. Three times that year Nevel Meldrum was in town and called on Deborah. She asked him to supper once and he simply raved over the suit-rising biscuits and the peach preserves. After supper he asked if he might smoke. That was the first time that Asaph had been shaken out of the room, Debby and Mrs. Larrabee could not have charished them as they did the odor of tobacco in the curtains next day. Mrs. Larrabee cried a little. Her husband had smoked.

Deborah was only now passing through the stanzas the average woman travels in her teens and early twenties. Deborah was having callers. Sometimes Asaph and Jim Crawford came the same night and tried to freeze each other out. Deborah knew the superlative female rapture of being quarreled over by two mates. And finally she had a proposal—from Asaph: from Josie's and Birdline's Asaph! They had left him alone with Debby once too often.

It was not a romantic wooing, and Asaph was not offering the first love of a bachelor heart. He was a trade-broken yellowster with a series of assorted orphans who have had something to do with him. His declaration was dragged out of him by jealousy and fear.

Jim Crawford, after numerous failures to decoy Deborah, had at last offered her the position of head saleswoman; this included not only authority and increase of pay, but two trips a year to New York as buyer!

Deborah's soul hungered for that journey to Carcassonne before she died, but she put the temptation from her as an ingratitude to Asaph. Still, when Asaph called the next evening it amused her to tell him that she was going to transfer herself to Crawford's—just to see what he would say and to amuse him. Her trifling joke brought a drama down on her head.

Asaph turned pale, gulped. "You're going to leave me, Deborah? Why?—I couldn't get along without you. Jim Crawford's in love with you, the old scoundrel. But I got a nicer house than what he has for you to live in, too. There's the children, of course; but you like children. They'd love you. They need mothering something awful. I been meaning to ask you to marry me, but I thought I ought to wait about thirty days more. But I couldn't let you go. You won't, will you? I want you should marry me. You will, won't you?"

Deborah stared at him agape. She had often wondered what she would say if the impossible should happen and a man should ask for her hand. And now it had come in the unlikeliest way, and what she said was:

"Sakes alive, Asa, one of us must be crazy!"

But he was in a panic, and he besetted and besought till she told him she would "think it over." The sensation was too delicious to be finished with an immediate monosyllable. He went away blustering. Her mother had slept through the cataclysm. Deborah postponed telling her and went to her room in a state of ecstatic distress.

Deborah was experiencing the rapturous terror that assails young brides, the dread of the profoundest revolution in a woman's life. Only in her case the terror was the greater from the double duration of her maidenhood. She was still a girl and yet gray was in her hair.

The thought of marriage was almost intolerably fearful, and yet it was almost intolerably beautiful.

How wonderful that she should be asked to marry the ideal of her youth. She could have a husband, a home and children of various ages, from the little tot to the grown-up. She had given up hope of having babies of her own, but she could acquire these ready-made. All her stifled domestic instincts flamed at the new empire offered her.

And then she remembered Josie and Josie's sneer: "Poor old Debby. She never was a rose."

And now Josie was dead a year and more, and Josie's children and Josie's lover were submitted to her to take or to leave. What a revenge it would be: what a squaring of old accounts! How she would turn the laugh back on them! How well she could laugh who wanted to the last!

Then she shook her head. What had she to do with revenge? We can all deal sharply with our friends, but we must be magnanimous with our foes.

Deborah waited to announce her decision till Asaph should call again. Then she told him what she had decided, but not why. He suspected every other reason except the truth. He was always a quick, hard fighter, and now Deborah had to endure what Josie had to endure all her life. He denounced her, threatened her, enquired her, pleaded with her; but Josie's ghost enphoroned the two, forbade the banes.

The next day in the store Asaph looked wretched. Deborah grew the more desirous for her denial. He had thought that he had but to ask her; and now she had refused his beseeching. He paused before her counter and begged her to reconsider.

He called at her home every evening. He went to her mother and implored her aid. The poor old soul could hardly believe her ears when she heard that Deborah was not only desired, but difficult. She promised Asaph that Deborah should yield, and he went away happy.

There was a weird conflict in the forsaken house that night. The old pictures nearly fell off the walls at the sight of the stupefied mother trying to compel her daughter to the altar. Mrs. Larrabee pointed out that there would never be another chance. The A. G. and St. P. Railway was in the receiver's hands. They would starve if Deborah lost her job.

Deborah's only answer was that she would go to Crawford's. Her mother could not shake her decision and hobbled off to bed in senile dismay. She had always been asking what the world was coming to, and now it was here.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW.)

SCRAPPLE



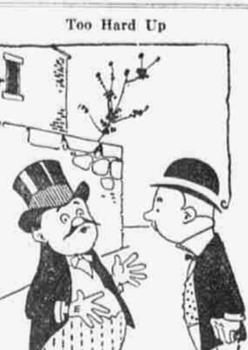
Proprietor of Dulbero's Emporium (with admirable presence of mind)—Mr. Binks, forward!

Good Shot



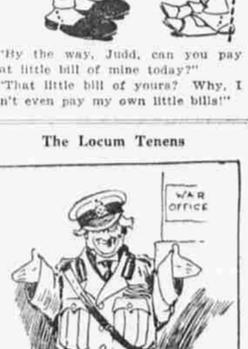
Tommy (his rifle at the enemy's seat of affection)—Hands up; or I'll blow your brains out!

Used Too Much



Customer—This stuff isn't any good. You told me it would make the hair grow, but it's falling out. Druggist—You're using too much of it, and the hairs are growing so quick that they come right out. Keep on with it.

Too Hard Up



By the way, Judd, can you pay that little bill of mine today? "That little bill of yours? Why, I can't even pay my own little bills!"

The Locum Tenens



Comedian—I've brought you a pet monkey to amuse you, darling. Leading Lady—Oh, how kind of you! Now I shan't miss you while you're away.

A Good Substitute



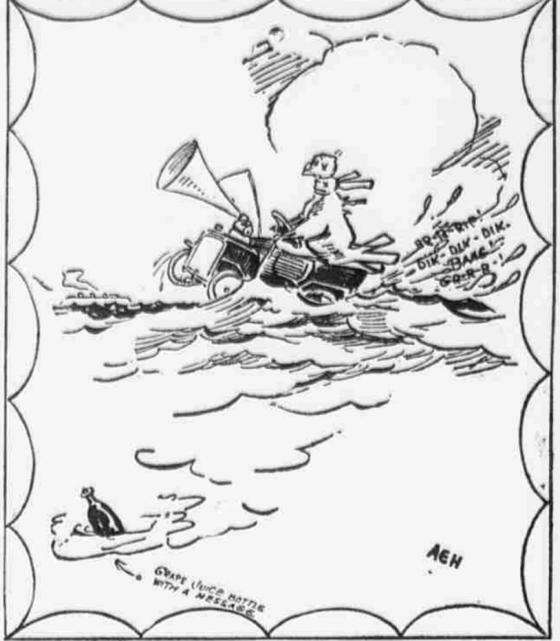
By the way, Judd, can you pay that little bill of mine today? "That little bill of yours? Why, I can't even pay my own little bills!"

A FEW MILITARY TERMS EXPLAINED



Daily Sketch.

THE PADDED CELL



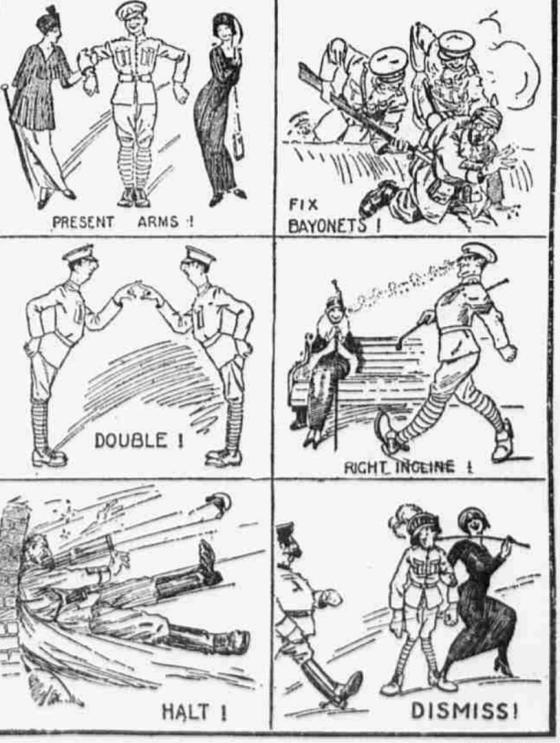
Customer—This stuff isn't any good. You told me it would make the hair grow, but it's falling out. Druggist—You're using too much of it, and the hairs are growing so quick that they come right out. Keep on with it.

ONCE IS ENUF!



Daily Sketch.

A FEW MILITARY TERMS EXPLAINED



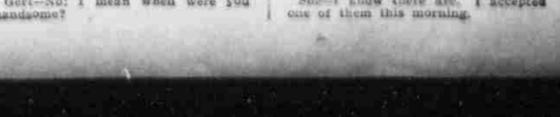
Daily Sketch.

She Couldn't See It



Best—I have been told that I was handsome. Best—When was that? Best—Today. Best—No, I mean when were you handsome?

She Should Worry



She—No, Percy, I like you, but I can never be your wife. He—Never mind. There are others. She—I know there are. I accepted one of them this morning.

FARMER SMITH'S RAINBOW CLUB

GOOD-NIGHT TALK

Behold! Here you see the Rainbow Button—the badge of our club. It is very wonderful and very beautiful, and there is no other button just like it.

Every boy and girl in Philadelphia and hereabouts will want one. We are sending them out as fast as we can, but it's first come first served. So do not delay sending in your pledge.

Yes, the pot of gold is there, right in the middle of the button. When you don't know your lessons or things seem to go wrong, look at the Rainbow on the button, for the Rainbow is the sign of Hope.

When you get your button you must keep it. We cannot send a second button to any one without charging two cents for it—so keep yours safe.

Make the button mean something to you when it arrives. Read the Rainbow Club news every night—write me letters and keep the club as lively as you can.

If you haven't a button, send for it today—copy the pledge on a postal card and save a cent.

FARMER SMITH, Children's Editor, EVENING LEDGER.

Form for joining the Rainbow Club with fields for Name, Address, Age, and School.

Our Postoffice Box

The Helping Hand Rainbow Club, of Newwood street, sends in a splendid message. The secretary, Miss Anna... says that the following members are making up Christmas stockings: Santa Claus; Catherine Collins; Florence Foster; Marion Daly; Grace... Marie Gahegan; Mary Collins; Zussy and her own busy little... Surely these little girls are spreading sunshine along the way!

Do You Know This?

- 1. What is more wonderful than a horse that can count? (Five credits.) 2. Why is Philadelphia more apt to have earthquakes than any other city? (Five credits.) 3. What sentence can you form from this name, CHARLES DICKENS? (Five credits.)

Great Doings in Henville



HI! I'M going to have some fun with Mr. Rooster," said Mrs. Leghorn, as she tucked her egg under her wing and hopped carefully down from the roost.

She deposited the egg outside the henhouse door and waited. It was the same egg she had scratched an 'L' on in order to know it was her very own egg.

By and by along came Mr. Rooster. "Good morning, Mrs. Leghorn," he began. "I hope you are happy this morning."

"I am very unhappy," said Mrs. Leghorn; "I can't find out what 'L' stands for."

"It stands for 'Leghorn,'" said Mr. Rooster.

"I know that," replied Mrs. Leghorn, but there are other things, too. 'L' sometimes stands for 'lonesomeness.'"

"No one can be lonesome at Christmas time," answered Mr. Rooster. "I thought perhaps 'L' stood for 'LOVE.'"

"What is love?" continued Mr. Rooster.

"You have never seen fluffy little heads pop out of a shell or you wouldn't ask such a foolish question. Go ask the wise old owl what love is," said Mrs. Leghorn.

So off trotted Mr. Rooster in search of the WISE OLD OWL.

For the Wee Ones

- Kitty's here, I wonder why? Froggie's sick, From eating pie! Kitty's cross, I wonder why? Maybe it's 'cause He ate her pie.

